

Maintains



Research supporting social
services to adapt to shocks

Conceptual framework for studying social protection responses to COVID-19

COVID-19 Series: Working Paper

Rodolfo Beazley, with Alexandra Doyle, Madhumitha Hebbar, Karin
Seyfert, and Ludovico Carraro

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About Maintains

This five-year (2018–2023) operational research programme is building a strong evidence base on how health, education, nutrition, and social protection systems can respond more quickly, reliably, and effectively to changing needs during and after shocks, whilst also maintaining existing services. Maintains is working in six focal countries—Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Kenya, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, and Uganda—undertaking research to build evidence and providing technical assistance to support practical implementation. Lessons from this work will be used to inform policy and practice at both national and global levels.

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Contacts



maintains@opml.co.uk



www.maintainsprogramme.org



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www.opml.co.uk.

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1 Introduction

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, 200 countries/territories have adapted their social protection systems in order to support their citizens and to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic. The way in which social protection systems have been adapted has differed widely and has included both the development of new social protection programmes, as well as the expansion and adaptation of existing programmes.¹ In some cases, the expectation of these changes has been that social protection programmes would be able to meet their traditional objectives whilst simultaneously supporting livelihoods and facilitating access to health, education, and other essential services.

All of the countries in which Maintains is active have announced adaptations of their social protection system, albeit with varying degrees of comprehensiveness. Given the many reforms and initiatives currently being implemented as part of the COVID-19 response, the current crisis presents a unique opportunity to learn across different countries, and to better understand how exactly social protection is used to respond to shocks, and what implications this has for investments in shock-responsive social protection systems going forward.

Maintains is conducting a cross-country study to provide an *ex ante* operational assessment of the way in which social protection programmes, processes, and delivery systems are used to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, and to understand the factors that have enabled successful responses, as well as the factors that constrain responses. Specifically, the study aims:

- to document the social protection responses in all six Maintains countries—and, in particular, the use of social protection delivery mechanisms² and information systems;³
- to assess these responses in terms of their adequacy, coverage, and comprehensiveness;⁴ and
- to provide recommendations for future responses and investments in shock-responsive social protection systems.

This working paper describes the conceptual framework that is used by Maintains to document and learn from the ongoing social protection responses to the socioeconomic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Sierra Leone. This framework builds on previous research and frameworks developed by:

- Oxford Policy Management (OPM) and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), in their research on [shock-responsive social protection systems](#) (2015–2018);

¹ See www.ugogentilini.net/

² The mechanisms in place for delivering cash or in-kind assistance to social protection beneficiaries and/or people affected by shocks (e.g. targeting mechanism, payment mechanism).

³ Socioeconomic, disaster risk, and vulnerability information to enable decision-making before and after a shock—including social registries and beneficiary registries, disaster risk management (DRM) information systems etc.

⁴ For definitions of key concepts see O'Brien *et al.* (2018).

- OPM and the World Food Programme (WFP), in their research on [shock-responsive social protection in Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (2016–2020);
- Social Protection Approaches to COVID-19 - Expert Advice Helpline SPACE, in their framing documents for research on [social protection approaches to COVID-19](#) (FCDO and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), 2020).

2 Conceptual framework

This framework proposes to focus the analysis of shock-responsive social protection relating to COVID-19 on three dimensions: response type, policies and operational procedures, and outcomes. Although social insurance, labour market/employment policies, and social assistance programmes are covered, the focus is placed on the latter, which includes both in-kind and cash transfers. The research will cover responses to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic only; however, where applicable and valuable, experiences from responses to other shocks may be included.

As part of this study, we will map each country's social protection responses to COVID-19. For each response, we will use this conceptual framework to guide the way in which we document the responses and learn lessons. In countries where a large number of social protection responses are implemented, we will focus on the most far-reaching responses.

The conceptual framework described in this working paper provides a comprehensive framework against which we plan to assess the social protection responses to COVID-19. However, the extent to which each of these dimensions can be assessed in-depth will depend on the data that are available. Due to the pandemic, no primary data collection will take place and the depth of analysis possible for each country will depend on what data are available.

Finally, humanitarian responses will only be covered in as far as they interact with national social protection responses, and the focus of the analysis will be precisely this type of interaction. Humanitarian responses implemented separately, although crucial in the response to COVID-19, are not covered by this framework.

3 Response type

3.1 System resilience: These are measures undertaken to enable the business continuity of social protection programmes and systems. These measures can be planned *ex ante* (before the shock strikes) or can be designed and implemented *ex post*. They can entail small tweaks to programme operations, such as advancing or staggering payment dates or suspending conditionalities, or they can involve bigger adjustments, such as changing the delivery modality (e.g. from school meals to food rations). These types of response entail only a temporary adjustment of the programme to ensure business continuity, but with the core aspects of the programme unchanged: objectives, target population, assistance, etc. System resilience includes on-demand programmes, which are designed to absorb additional demand on an ongoing basis. Although these programmes are shock responsive by nature, when there are sudden spikes in demand they may need to be adjusted (e.g. additional resources may be allocated) to absorb the new demand.

3.2 Adaptation: This response type involves adapting the design of existing social protection systems to address new needs through enhancement of adequacy, coverage, and comprehensiveness.

3.2.1 *Vertical expansions*: These involve increasing the benefit value or duration of an existing programme for existing beneficiaries. Vertical expansions include additional transfers, increases to regular amounts, changes to payment duration and/or frequency that result in a benefit increase, and a reduction in the hours of work that results in higher benefits per hour.

3.2.2 *Horizontal expansions*: These involve adding new beneficiaries to an existing programme. This includes the extension of the geographical coverage of an existing programme, extraordinary enrolment campaigns, modifications of entitlement rules, and relaxation of requirements/conditionalities to facilitate more participation, among others.

3.2.3 *New programmes*: This refers to launching a temporary social protection response programme to provide support to people who already participate in regular social protection programme and/or to those who do not. This type of response is originally designed as time-bound, although ultimately the programme may be extended and incorporated into regular social protection programming.

3.3 Humanitarian assistance that leverages social protection systems, and vice versa: This refers to circumstances where, in addition to a social protection response to the pandemic, the international humanitarian system is delivering institutionally independent support that follows humanitarian principles and is formally coordinated with the social protection sector, including government and other actors. (This excludes humanitarian responses where the delivery of assistance is parallel to or stand-alone from national social protection systems.) In such circumstances, social protection can leverage the humanitarian systems, or vice versa. These circumstances can be conceptualised into two categories:

3.3.1 Piggy-backing: This involves leveraging or combining elements of the administrative capacity of humanitarian systems and/or social protection in order to respond to the pandemic: for example, where the humanitarian response uses the information systems and databases of social protection or a social protection payment delivery mechanism; or where a social protection response leverages the grievance redress mechanism of the humanitarian response or of another social protection programme.

3.3.2 Alignment: This involves aligning social protection and/or humanitarian interventions with one another. For example, transfer amounts are agreed with the social protection lead agency or caseloads/geographic areas are split between social protection and humanitarian responses.

4 Policies and operational procedures

This dimension, largely based on the analytical approaches developed by SPACE, examines in more detail how the response approach selected from those above is operationalised. This dimension includes how the policies, systems, and operational procedures used along the delivery chain are developed and/or adjusted to implement the responses described above. It focuses on social protection, although other related sectors, like disaster risk management (DRM) and humanitarian assistance, are included in regard to their interactions with social protection in the relevant dimension.

Some of the dimensions below may not be explicitly used or adjusted for a given country's COVID-19 response—for example, legislation and policies—however, they are included in the conceptual framework because they affect the way in which social protection can respond.

4.1 Policies and scope of systems:

4.1.1 Institutional arrangements: The legislation, policies and policy goals, and mandates of key institutions.

4.1.2 Coordination mechanisms: The mechanisms and protocols for coordinating DRM activities before and after a shock, including the role of social protection.

4.1.3 Financing mechanisms: The way in which social protection responses are funded.

4.1.4 Data sharing, protection, and privacy: This includes issues related to data collection and sharing protocols, data accessibility, data relevance and accuracy, and security and privacy protocols. It also includes the use of data from other sectors.

4.2 Programme design: This includes objectives; eligibility criteria and qualifying conditions; the duration, type, and level of benefits and services provided; conditionalities; gender and social inclusion provisions; accountability to affected populations; layering or linking of additional measures etc.

4.3 Operational procedures (service delivery): This includes the business processes, systems, and capacity required to implement a programme. This typically includes four phases, each with a number of sub-activities, as shown in Figure 1. We consider programme management as a cross-cutting requirement across all delivery systems and processes, rather than as a separate phase.

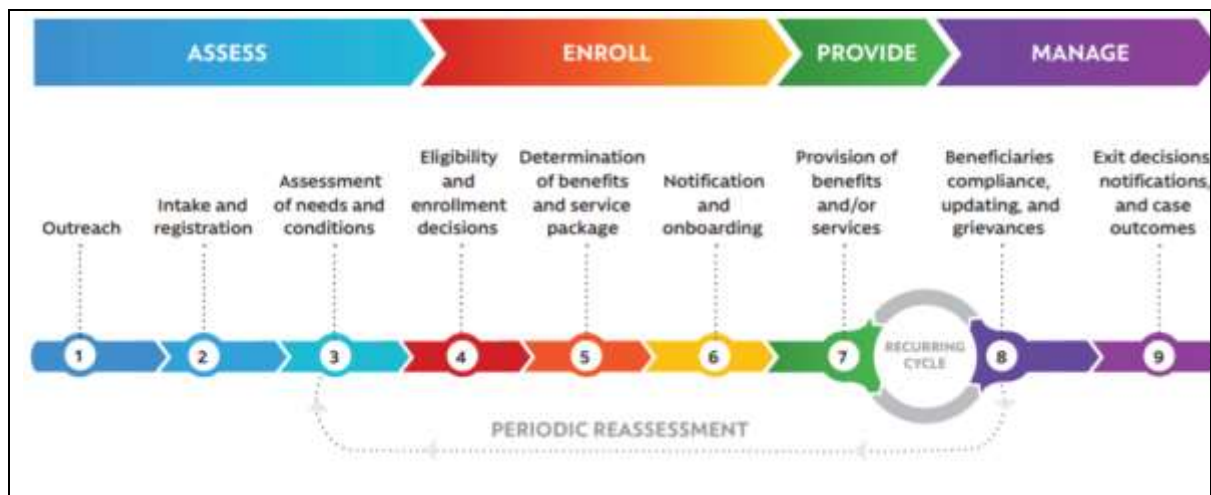
4.3.1 Assessing the potential demand for the programme, which includes outreach activities, data collection and management for registration, and assessing needs.

4.3.2 Enrolling beneficiaries, which entails determining the eligibility of applicants, determining the benefit package, and on-boarding beneficiaries.

4.3.3 Providing benefits and services.

4.3.4 Monitoring the programme's performance, including disaggregating performance by sex and vulnerability criteria (e.g. disability, refugee status etc.).

Figure 1: Delivery systems and processes



Source: Lindert *et al.* (2020)

5 Outcomes of the response

This dimension will be used to assess the outcomes of each social protection response (at the programme level), as well as each country's overall response, to understand the extent to which country-level responses perform against the following criteria:

5.1 Adequacy: Is the support sufficiently tailored to the (new) needs of the vulnerable population to cover their risks?

5.2 Coverage: Are all individuals or households at risk or affected by the shock covered by the existing or new programmes?

5.3 Comprehensiveness: Are all risks addressed? (In reference to risks that social protection responses can help to mitigate, including the sequencing or layering of additional measures)

5.4 Timeliness: Was the response implemented in time to address the shocks that it was intended to address?

5.6 Cost-effectiveness: Are responses coordinated across different actors, resulting in reduced cost and enhanced effectiveness?

5.7 Predictability: Is support delivered regularly and predictably? This is an important element of social protection, and an analysis of this could be useful in terms of recommendations for improvements to systems.

5.7 Accountability to the affected population: Do responses enhance the dignity of affected populations and ensure that gender and protection risks are mitigated? Do responses include COVID-19 safety measures and adequate grievance redressal mechanisms?

5.8 Long-term implications: What are the implications of the responses for the design, implementation, and funding of future social protection? This includes the extent of government ownership and broader political economy considerations. Is the design and delivery of programmes embedded in long-term government systems, and does it strengthen those systems?

6 Looking ahead

As part of the Maintains study, we will use this conceptual framework to guide our assessment of the social protection responses to COVID-19 in the six Maintains countries. The outputs of this research will be presented in the form of six country case studies, as well as a cross-country assessment of the responses.

This document should also be used in conjunction with SPACE's [guidance note](#) for framing case studies on social protection responses to COVID-19, which builds on this conceptual framework and suggests a structure of the key areas and dimensions to consider, together with detailed questions to answer under each heading.

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